



Joar Haga, *Was there a Lutheran Metaphysics? The Interpretation of communication idiomatum in Early Modern Lutheranism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 2012. ISBN 978-3-525-55037-3.

The recently launched Refo500 Academic Studies series promises to become a very important set of contributions to our understanding of the 16th century Reformers, Reformations, and their intellectual and spiritual descendants. That is most assuredly the case with the present number in that series as it does indeed take us forward concerning our understanding of early Lutheran thought.

Haga's revised doctoral dissertation 'traces the Lutheran doctrine of communication idiomatum, the exchange of properties between the natures of Christ, as it developed in the 16th and the early 17th Century'.¹

Lest, however, potential readers imagine the topic to be too arcane for their tastes let me assure you that it is one of the most important doctrinal aspects with which Christian theology has to do; for it asks how it is that Christ is present in the world and yet, as theology claims, also present in Heaven. Or, to be more precise, it is the

...“communication of proper qualities” or “communication of attributes,” a term that refers to the relationship between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. In the Reformed understanding, because the God-man is a single person with two natures, the properties of each nature can be predicated of the theanthropic (i.e., “God-man”) person. Thus, it would be correct to say “Jesus Christ is eternal” as well as “Jesus Christ was born in the fullness of time,” since both divine and human attributes and activities can be predicated of Jesus Christ, the theanthropic person. On the other hand, it would be incorrect to predicate the attributes of one nature to the other nature, as in “Christ’s human nature is omnipresent.” The Lutherans, while agreeing that the attributes of each nature can be predicated of the theanthropic person, also argue that, in view of the hypostatic union, the human nature of Christ is elevated and enriched by attributes of the divine person of the Logos, in whom the human nature became enhypostatically united. For example, in the Lutheran view Christ’s human nature is exalted with the attribute of omnipresence (also called ubiquity). Indeed, the

¹ From the back cover.

Lutherans delineate three kinds or genera of the *communicatio*: *genus idiomaticum*, *genus majesticum*, and *genus apotelesmaticum*. *Genus idiomaticum*, as already described, refers to the predication of the attributes of either nature to the theanthropic person. *Genus majesticum* is, as Shedd tells it, the communication of the properties of one nature to the other. Finally, *genus apotelesmaticum* refers to the cooperation of each nature in the work of the God-man. For example, in the atonement the human nature experiences suffering and death, while the divine nature upholds the human nature to bear up under the awful weight of sin.²

Haga's valuable volume discusses how all of that 'works' in 16th and 17th century Lutheranism and he does so by, first, discussing Luther's views (pp. 21-90), then Melancthon's different solution (pp. 91-114), and then the development of the doctrine between Luther and the Formula of Concord (pp. 115-212), and finally the controversy which erupted between the theological faculties of Giessen and Tübingen concerning the subject (pp. 213-270). The tome concludes with a return to the central question: Was There a Lutheran Metaphysics? (pp. 271-275).

Each chapter concludes with a summary, all of which readers may want to visit first so as to have an overview of the entire work: a roadmap, as it were, of what to expect. Then, readers are advised to work their way, carefully, through each rewarding chapter, revisiting the summaries once more at the conclusion of each. Finally, to refresh all of that which has been learned in this compactly argued work, one final reading of each chapter summary is in order.

Haga's work includes a discussion of Luther's and Zwingli's interactions concerning the Lord's Supper and the attendant discussion of the *communicatio idiomatum*. Here Haga engages in a very fine analysis of Zwingli's 'Commentary on True and False Religion' of 1526, and his 'Friendly Exegesis' of 1527 along with, naturally, Luther's response in his 'Confession Concerning Christ's Supper' of 1528. In these works and because of this controversy, Haga suggests, Luther

...developed his specific Christological doctrine... (p. 64).

But

... one may say that it reaches its matured stage towards the end of his life. *Communicatio idiomatum* occupies a particularly important place in the two great Christological disputations of Luther, namely "The Word Became Flesh" (1539) and "On the divinity and humanity of Christ" (1540)(p. 64).

After a faithful exposition of those documents, the remainder of the volume shows, brilliantly, exactly how Luther's followers modified, adjusted, adapted, and clarified the Reformer's views.

Was, then, there a Lutheran metaphysics? Certainly. Q.E.D., thanks to Haga's devotion to his task and his careful critical comprehensive competence.

Without reservation I can commend this volume and do heartily recommend it to those who are interested in Church History, Dogmatic Theology, the History of the Reformation, and all related fields. Readers will learn much.

² Shedd, W. G. T. (2003). *Dogmatic theology* (A. W. Gomes, Ed.) (3rd ed.) (pp. 952-953). Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub.

Jim West
Quartz Hill School of Theology